

Stone Bay School

External validation date: 15th September 2025

External Validator: John Rees

Outcome: Based on the findings of the visit, I can confirm that the external validation visit was successful, and I am therefore pleased to inform you that Stone Bay School now holds Externally Validated Healthy Schools Status.

Information about the assessment process

- The school self-evaluated their current Healthy Schools practice within the four core themes, Personal, Social & Health Education (PSHE), Healthy Eating, Physical Activity and Social, Emotional & Mental Health (SEMH), using the School Health Check prior to the external validation visit. The school judged itself in each theme using the appropriate grade descriptors.
- The external validator interviewed groups of pupils, parents, staff, parent governors and the head teacher.
- A tour of the school was conducted to observe Healthy Schools in practice.
- Relevant paperwork was presented as stated in the agreed list of documentation before and during the validation visit.

The school has the following strengths

General:

Stone Bay School is a specialist school with a small residential unit for children and young people aged 4-19 who have a diagnosis of ASD, along with severe and complex learning needs. The school was originally housed in a Victorian building that has been extended multiple times and now provides a rich learning and caring environment for both staff and pupils. Recent developments at the school have covered a concrete play area with Astroturf, with outdoor gym equipment, trampolines at ground level, and an undercover sand and sensory area, as well as wooden structures that offer pupils creative and imaginative play areas. These are also designed to give opportunities for developing balance, gross motor skills, and both sensory stimulation and calming. In addition to the 'Forest Schools' area, there are gardening areas where chickens are reared and cared for, and the school has imaginative plans for therapy dogs and an on-site café. All of this is located within a two-minute walk of the beach. A creative, recently redesigned curriculum encourages staff to take every opportunity to develop pupils' learning and their social-emotional well-being.

For children and young people with the appropriate complex and frequently significant learning needs, this is an excellent school to attend.

The ethos of nurture and caring, combined with high expectations for all, is tangible and is represented throughout the school, the website, documentation, grounds, and attitudes embodied by the staff. Considerable time and care have been taken to generate this ethos and provision, and staff have responded well to the energy and innovative ideas of the relatively new headteacher.

The buildings have been appropriately adapted to meet the needs of pupils, and there is an almost seamless integration between indoor and outdoor learning. Most of the classrooms have a small, enclosed outdoor area which allows pupils to access a range of safe, sensory spaces. Easy access is then facilitated to safe, enclosed grounds which offer a significant array of sensory and learning opportunities. Staff and pupils can

frequently be found enjoying learning outdoors, both on and off-site. Such opportunities go a long way to meeting the school's vision to provide an outstanding, nurturing, learning environment.

One of the most significant strengths is the leadership provided by Ms Hatwell, who is energetic and imaginative, but also sets high expectations for pupils and staff to enable children and young people to experience the best possible education and enjoy optimising their learning experiences. These expectations are tailored to meet the learning needs of individuals, supporting the vision statement "getting it right for every pupil," and many past pupils have gone on to enjoy employment and independent living.

Ms Hatwell has been ably and enthusiastically assisted by Ms Taylor, the long-standing Deputy Headteacher, other members of the leadership team, Ms Asaw (leading on social and emotional well-being) and Mr DiSpirito (leading on physical activity). Together with other staff members, a vibrant and positive learning environment has been created that supports the learning and social needs of children and young people while also promoting staff well-being.

Some excellent baseline assessments on all aspects of the Healthy Schools process were made, and progress has been mapped against all of these areas to a very good standard.

The other most noticeable characteristics of the school are the whole-school approach to learning and well-being, which is supported by a strong sense of community and excellent relationships between pupils and all staff members. Considerable thought and care are given to staff allocation to individual pupils. This requires senior leaders and individual staff members to develop an excellent, detailed understanding of the needs and capacities of individual pupils, as well as to reflect on the impact they are having on the engagement, motivation, and development of pupils.

PSHE:

A PSHE ethos contributes strongly to the curriculum and informs almost everything that staff and pupils do together. All pupils have different levels of need, including complex learning difficulties, and are encouraged to become increasingly independent through the development of their self-confidence, knowledge, and skills. It is a huge credit to the staff and school that these diverse needs are met so consistently and effectively.

PSHE, and in particular aspects of RSE, are well resourced in line with other curriculum areas. This is further supported by planned curriculum time and staff CPD. Leadership time has been given to the subject leader for preparing and planning. There are also opportunities for class leaders to meet to discuss resources and the needs of different pupils. It is a testament to the high levels of staff support for collaboration that, despite Ms Asaw's maternity leave, provision continues uninterrupted.

Teaching and support staff know the pupils very well and plan and adapt a curriculum that is appropriate to meet their needs. It is well understood that some pupils can become socially and sexually frustrated, and so gentle and appropriate teaching helps them manage this with privacy and dignity. Staff work hard to provide a personalised curriculum that meets the needs of different pupils, and to provide carefully constructed careers pathways as pupils move towards the end of their time at Stone Bay.

Considerable efforts are made to enable pupils to engage with the local community, breaking down barriers for the school and individual pupils. Although the school was unable to complete the purchase of a commercial property in Broadstairs, plans are very much in hand to create an on-site café. This will provide pupils with opportunities for work experience, social and skill development, and also provide a welcome respite for parents and visitors.

PSHE objectives are supported through a well-planned and carefully adapted series of assemblies and activities, all aligned to promote the personal, social, and health development of pupils. This provision is further enhanced by engagement with external specialists, including speech and language therapists, occupational health professionals, physiotherapists, performing arts therapists, and the imminent

introduction of therapy dogs, all of which contribute to the PSHE agenda and support pupils' social and emotional learning.

Healthy Eating:

Managing the food and healthy eating habits of such diverse pupils takes adaptability and planning. As with all other aspects of the Healthy Schools work at Stone Bay School, all aspects of healthy eating are well led, carefully thought through, and have a positive impact on pupils.

A healthy eating and school food action plan is in place, which is regularly reviewed, updated, and linked to the school improvement plan. Food in the curriculum is celebrated through healthy eating sessions and themed food days. The horticulture area grows food, and the chickens produce eggs for products such as quiche. Food waste is used to support learning about composting, and residential pupils have been positively engaged with this.

Food and drink policies are fully inclusive and accessible to pupils and their families, as appropriate. Individual pupils have their own eating and drinking plans, which are well supported by staff with their detailed knowledge of the pupils' individual needs and preferences. The dining areas are carefully managed and offer opportunities for pupils to eat together or in a quieter setting. These spaces have been thoughtfully adapted to meet the needs of different pupils. Pupils are also encouraged to develop their social and emotional skills through careful interaction in the dining areas.

Many pupils are encouraged to learn about cooking and food preparation through the well-planned curriculum. Pupils can take advantage of the growing area, which features raised beds for growing vegetables, fruit trees, and chickens for eggs, thereby contributing to their understanding of where food comes from. Plans are appropriately adapted to meet the needs of pupils and are tailored to meet their likes, dietary requirements, and social and sensory needs. Pupils are fully engaged in influencing the content and evaluating the quality of the curriculum, and their views are actively sought and responded to.

Resources are in place to support all aspects of the healthy eating agenda, and there is a wide range of cooking equipment available in the school. These have all been adapted to meet the needs of pupils, although senior staff suggest that some cooking resources and appliances need updating and have therefore been included in the school business plan.

Thoughtful and carefully adapted links are made with parents/carers to ensure that pupils' dietary requirements are met, and that they are encouraged to develop their interest in food and cooking to the best of their ability.

Physical Activity:

Physical activity is encouraged for all pupils who engage enthusiastically and respond to tasks and challenges that are carefully adapted to provide appropriate stretch and challenge for their needs. This includes activities such as the 'daily mile', which is a shared experience for pupils and staff, and has also been supported by whole-school CPD and engagement with 'Active Kent'. Pupils are encouraged to participate in a variety of physical activities to promote their physical and emotional well-being. One member of staff gave a sensitive and moving description of how she was helping a pupil manage his physical activity to his evident enjoyment.

Despite the inevitable security needs, there are paths around the site that take people to different parts of the grounds, and some interesting and creative approaches have been taken to add sensory stimulus underfoot and at the entrances to classrooms and buildings, provoking curiosity in pupils.

Pupils are encouraged to develop their gross and fine motor skills, according to their needs and abilities. It was also a delight to observe a pupil using some limited language to engage with staff and enjoy the sensations of learning and playing on the outdoor equipment. Staff provided almost limitless patience, which enabled pupils to enjoy repeated and diverse opportunities for physical activity that met their needs, while

also offering appropriate challenge through the climbing equipment, forest schools and gardening areas and trips to the beach.

As noted above, physical activity is encouraged through the creative use of outdoor space, which includes a static gym offering a range of different physical activities and learning opportunities. One pupil was clearly enjoying the trampoline and the sensations of movement. This was also helping him to emotionally self-regulate very effectively. Other opportunities are provided through stepping-up, balance, and other physical challenges, which are adapted to meet pupils' needs. The forethought, planning and execution of these activities are excellent, providing opportunities for physical activity and to meet emotional needs.

The vision and passionate commitment of senior leaders to promote physical activity and all aspects of pupils' educational opportunities is reflected in their determination to give pupils the opportunity to engage with the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. This will present pupils with exciting opportunities to develop practical, social, and emotional skills, and will no doubt be enthusiastically embraced by the ever-supportive staff.

Social, Emotional & Mental Health (SEMH):

Although the school encourages learning and academic attainment, the SEMH of pupils and staff is promoted and supported throughout every aspect of the school, wherever possible. It is woven throughout the curriculum and every interpersonal engagement. With a very clear focus on the needs of pupils, staff briefings provide a delightful, collegiate start to the day, which is also linked to breakfast.

The physical and emotional challenges of working with children and young people with such diverse and specific needs are understood and acknowledged by leaders throughout the school. The almost inevitable physical knocks and emotional bruises that all staff face are recognised, and senior leaders have created an outstanding ethos that promotes staff well-being as an essential precursor to the care, compassion, and aspirations they consistently provide for pupils.

Pupil voice is encouraged, literally and metaphorically to help continue to improve the provision for pupils, while also developing their social skills, self-confidence, and a strong sense of community. Pupils who can communicate verbally are encouraged, and non-verbal communication, through pointing and the use of specific images, which are now consistent throughout the school, is being introduced to the local area.

All of the usual policies have been updated and are now in place, carefully adapted by staff and pupils to respond to and meet the diverse needs of different pupils. Staff consistently encourage pupils to communicate and develop their autonomy without any real sense of limitation. This inevitably encourages pupils to become increasingly independent and autonomous, as far as circumstances allow. The social and emotional needs of different pupils are managed and responded to with dignity and compassion, and an awareness that behaviour is a form of communication, and this must be responded to professionally and appropriately.

All staff consciously and consistently model courteous, supportive relationships with pupils and each other. Although staff acknowledge that senior leaders have decisions to make, there is a sense of trust and mutual respect that underpins the school's culture. All members of staff, including the newest and most junior members, are encouraged to share their ideas, which are treated with dignity as part of a flat leadership structure, that is collegiate in style. This builds confidence and a can-do attitude among staff, and encourages them to be creative in their approach, while also being compassionate and supportive of pupils and one another.

Areas for development

General:

Although the school has already made a significant investment in various sensory and therapeutic provisions, as well as specialist staff, this could still be further extended. There are some exciting developments planned, including formalising the use of therapy dogs and developing an on-site café to

benefit pupils and visitors. School leaders are aware of the importance of building positive relationships with nearby residents and increasing awareness within the local community of the needs of Stone Bay pupils.

PSHE:

The curriculum and school grounds already provide excellent opportunities for personal and social development. The recently revised expectations for relationships (and sex) and health education become statutory from September 2026 and appropriate adaptation to meet the needs of pupils should be incorporated into policy and planning.

Healthy Eating:

This is already very well provided for through the curriculum and practical arrangements for pupils' eating. Consideration should be given to regularly revisiting pupil voice, to ensure changing needs are met and responded to. The development of the on-site café should also be incorporated as part of this planning.

Physical Activity:

Plans, which are already in hand, to enable pupils to engage with the challenges and opportunities presented by the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme should be encouraged. The outdoor area has already been significantly improved, although consideration should be given to providing some additional staff CPD to ensure that these opportunities are optimised.

Social, Emotional & Mental Health (SEMH):

As noted above, all staff are aware of the importance of modelling and providing adapted approaches to meet the diverse needs of pupils. There are already plans for some exciting opportunities to help inform and educate the local community, whether through engagement with local residents, the school transport service, or more widely in Broadstairs and beyond.

Quotes from the External Validation visit

Pupils:

I really like our school; it helps us to be healthy, and we do lots of things with staff to make everybody healthy.

Staff:

The well-being of pupils and staff is at the heart of what we do at Stone Bay. The leadership is now excellent and is always looking for ways to improve outcomes for pupils.

I really like being a member of staff here. Everyone is kind and helpful and looks out for each other as well as the pupils.

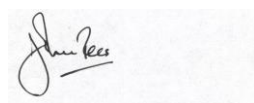
Everyone pulls together as a team; everyone works so hard to get the best for our learners.

Parents/Governors:

I have been so delighted at the way my child has been supported and cared for by the school. They really listen to us, and nothing is too much trouble for the staff.

Thank you to all concerned who took part in the external validation process and for making me so welcome on the day. I wish you every success in the future.

Kind regards



John Rees
Healthy Schools External Validator
On behalf of Leeds Health and Wellbeing Service